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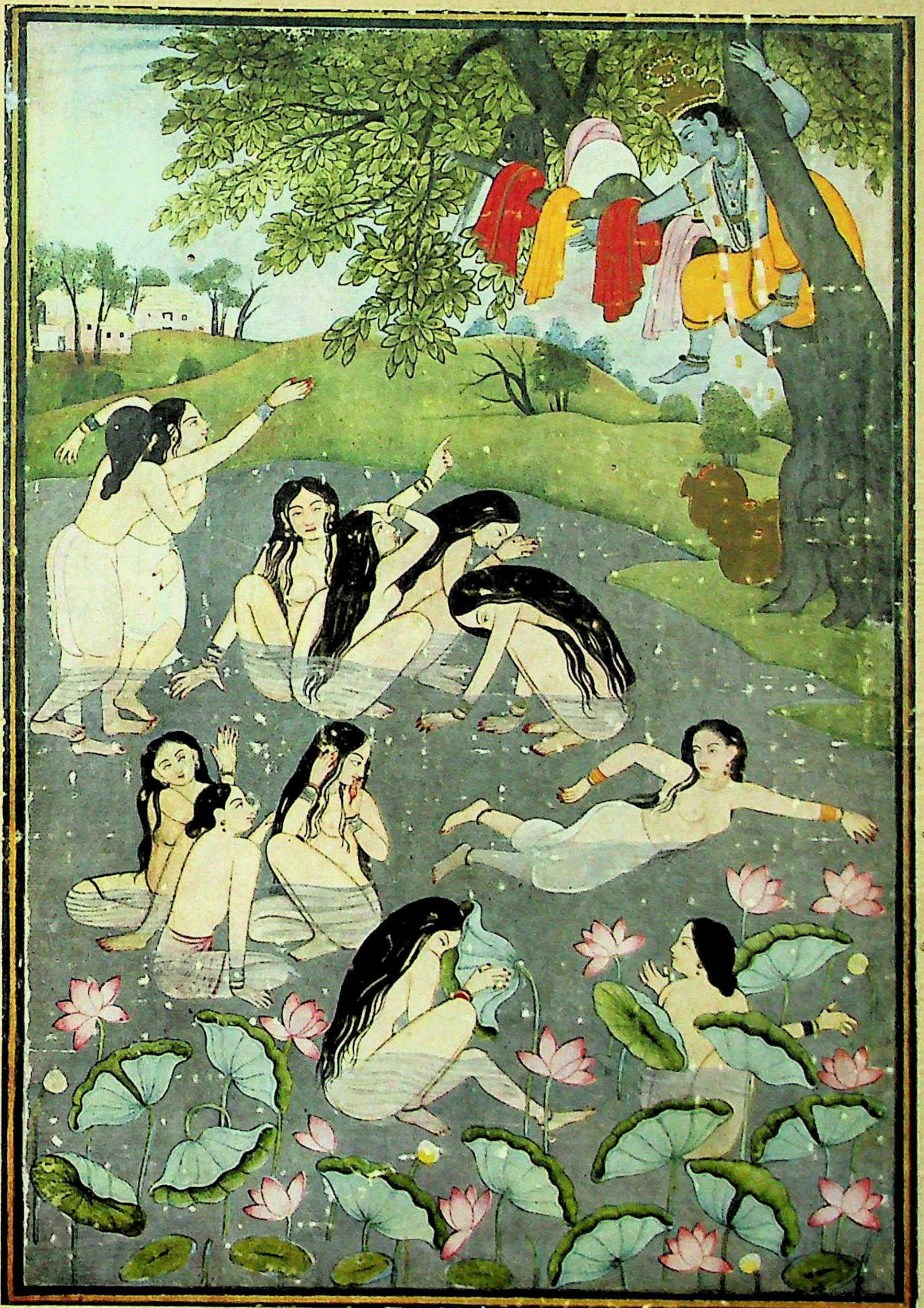
# The Kṛishṇa Legend



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# THE KṚISHṆA LEGEND

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*The Kṛishṇa Legend* is the second publication in the above series. The first was *Mughal Miniatures* which received a splendid reception from the art-loving public. *Mewar Painting* by Dr. Motichandra is already in press and will be the third brochure to be issued. Others will follow from year to year.

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# THE KṚISHṆA LEGEND

In the Hindu Trinity, Vishṇu is the Preserver, the guardian of life.

When sins multiply, Vishṇu reincarnates himself to rid the earth of its calamities. Kṛishṇa is regarded as the eighth incarnation of Vishṇu, and the legends relating to him are found in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and its Hindi version the *Prema Sāgara.*

There are many distinct elements in the Kṛishṇa legend which indicate that it is of composite origin. Thus, there is Kṛishṇa, the cowherd, the boy-god of Mathurā-Vrindāvan, also known as Gopāla-Kṛishṇa. Possibly, he is a deity of vegetation, and tribal god of Ahīras, Gūjars and Jāts. His brother Balarāma is the bearer of the plough, a symbol of agriculture. The view that Kṛishṇa was the god of mountains and vegetation finds support in the well known legend of the worship of the mountain Govardhan (Plate 5).

There is also perhaps a Dravidian element in the Kṛishṇa legend, for we find an ancient reference to Kṛishṇa Gopāla in the early Tamil anthologies, where Māyon (The Dark One) plays his flute and sports with milkmaidens.

Again, there is a mention of Kṛishṇa Devakīputra in the *Chhāndogya Upanishad.* Keith in his *Sanskrit Literature* says that there was a tradition about Kṛishṇa as a *ṛishi* from the time of the Ṛigvedic hymns.

Then there is Kṛishṇa who plays an important part in the epic of the *Mahābhārata.* He was undoubtedly a Kshatriya warrior of the Yādava clan. The *Bhagvad Gītā*, which is always associated with Kṛishṇa, expounds the doctrine of action and non-attachment which Kṛishṇa preached on the battlefield of Kurukshetra when he revealed his real self to Arjuna.

*Endowed with countless mouths and countless eyes,*
*It was as if the firmament were filled,*
*All in an instant, with a thousand suns.*

Lastly, there is Kṛishṇa, the king of Dwārakā, who fought numerous demons, married Rukmiṇī, daughter of the king of Vidarbha, and led a princely life in the company of his many wives. There came a time when the Yādava chiefs slew one another in a drunken brawl. Kṛishṇa's son was killed, and his brother Balarāma, sick at heart, departed from the earth. Overwhelmed by the loss of his son, brother and kinsmen, Kṛishṇa went to a forest and lay under a tree. There, a hunter mistaking him for a deer, shot an arrow which pierced his heel, the only vulnerable part of his body, and thus he died. Soon after, the doomed city of Dwārakā was engulfed by the sea.

The emergence of Kṛishṇa as the supreme God is indicated by many legends in which we can sense the conflict between the Kṛishṇa cult and the worship of the Vedic deities. For instance, there is the story of how Kṛishṇa humbles Brahmā when he abducts Kṛishṇa's cowherd companions and their cows and confines them in a cave. Brahmā is thus made to realize the greatness of Kṛishṇa and supplicates him as the creator of all. Again, in the *Giri Govardhan* episode (Plate 5) Kṛishṇa seduces the inhabitants of Vraja from the worship of the rain god Indra and converts them to the worship of the mountain Govardhan. Indra finally acknowledges Kṛishṇa's superiority.

The doctrine of *bhaktī*, as set forth in the *Bhagvad Gītā*, was evolved long before the birth of Christ. Even in the second century B.C. Kṛishṇa, in the form known as Kṛishṇa Vāsudeva, had become the supreme God. Later on, poet-philosophers such as Nimbārka, Jayadeva, Vidyāpati and Chaṇḍīdās emphasized the identification of Gopāla Kṛishṇa, the cowherd of our legend, with the older Kṛishṇa Vāsudeva of the *bhaktī* cult.

In the sixteenth century A.D., Vraja, the country around Mathurā, became the home of a school of poets, founded by Vallabhāchārya and his son Viṭṭhalanātha, devoted to Kṛishṇa-worship. These poets were followed by Sūr Dās, the blind mystic; Bihārī Lāl, the author of the *Satsāiyā* (700 couplets on the Kṛishṇa legend); and many others. They brought into prominence the stories of Rādhā and the milk-maids (*gopīs*) who are symbols of Vaishṇava mysticism. Kṛishṇa, to his devotees, was the Supreme Deity, while Rādhā was the human soul. It was a religion that taught the necessity of absolute and entire surrender to God. The soul's devotion is pictured by Rādhā's abandonment of herself to her beloved Kṛishṇa, and all the hot blood of oriental passion pours forth one mighty flood of praise and prayer to the Infinite Creator.

The love play of Kṛishṇa and the *gopīs* is known as the *Kṛishna Līlā*. In Vaishṇava experience the *Kṛishṇa Līlā* is not an historical event, but an eternal reality. As the poet Nīlakaṇṭha expresses it, 'the narration is not the real point'. The heart of man is the seat of this *Līlā*.

The fundamental concept of Vaishṇava theology is to be found in its view of the universe, not as a complete illusion, but as a reality wherein God reveals His presence to man. The whole drama of life, and the most intimate moments of passion are, in the last analysis, a spiritual experience reflected in the relation of the Lover and the Beloved.

Kṛishṇa belonged to the Yādava tribe, a pastoral people, who lived in Vrindāvan and Gokul on both sides of the Jamunā. In those days Kaṅsa had become the ruler of Mathurā after deposing his father Ugrasena. Kaṅsa was a wicked King and on account of his oppression even the patient Mother Earth groaned and sought the intercession of Vishṇu who promised to deliver the earth from this oppressor.

Now Ugrasena had a brother whose daughter, Devakī, was married to one Vasudeva. It was foretold that a son of Devakī would destroy the wicked Kaṅsa. To forestall his doom Kaṅsa kept Vasudeva and Devakī confined in his palace and ensured that the first six children born to Devakī were put to death. When she conceived her seventh child it was miraculously transferred from her womb to that of Rohiṇī who was Vasudeva's second wife. This child was Balarāma, later to be Kṛishṇa's constant companion.

Devakī's eighth child was Kṛishṇa. At the time of his birth the palace prison was filled with a radiance. As Vasudeva lifted the new-born babe, wondering how he could save it, his fetters fell apart and the heavy prison doors swung open. The story of how Vasudeva took Kṛishṇa across the river to Gokul and exchanged him with the newly born female child of Yaśodā, the wife of the village headman Nand, is told in the note to Plate 1 which illustrates this episode of the exchange of the babes.

Kṛishṇa was reared at Gokul by Nand and Yaśodā as their own son, and there are many delightful stories of his boyish pranks such as the *Mākhan Chor* (Plate 2). But the wicked Kaṅsa, in league with powerful demons, contrived to have repeated attempts made on the young Kṛishṇa's life. These, however, one and all, ended in each aggressor meeting his inevitable doom. A demoness named Pūtanā suckled him, when he was an infant, with the poisoned milk of her breasts, but he drained away her very life blood. In her dying agonies she worshipped Kṛishṇa and thus obtained salvation. Another demon named Arishṭa, in the form of a mighty bull, attacked the young god but Kṛishṇa seized him by his horns and broke his massive neck. Yet another demon named Bakāsur, in the form of a giant crane, swallowed up young Kṛishṇa who made himself so hot that the crane had to disgorge him. Then Kṛishṇa seized the beak of the great bird and tore it asunder. Then there was the demon Dhenuka who, in the form of an ass, attacked Kṛishṇa and his brother Balarāma, but the latter caught him by his feet and dashed him to death in a grove of palm trees. Another demon, named Triṇāvart, carried away the child Kṛishṇa in a whirlwind, but when the demon had reached a great height Kṛishṇa became heavy as a mountain and thrust the demon down, and the monster fell to the earth and was killed.

The episodes relating to Kṛishṇa's destruction of these and other demons were frequently illustrated by Pahārī painters.

There are many other exploits of the boy Kṛishṇa which are equally popular with poets and painters —such as the quelling of the terrible serpent Kāliya (Plate 4), the raising of Mount Govardhan (Plate 5) and the swallowing of the forest fire (Plate 7).

It was an idyllic life that Kṛishṇa and his young cowherd companions led at Vrindāvan (Plate 3), tending the village herds all day long in woodland pastures. When evening came the herds would slowly wend their way back to the cow-pens. This was the most beautiful of all hours — the hour of cow dust.

*As they return, our lowly street*
*Wears beauty like a diadem.*

Another aspect of this idyllic life at Vrindāvan is associated with the amours of Kṛishṇa and the *gopīs* (Plates 11 & 12) and in particular with the young god's romance with Rādhā, the loveliest of them all (Plates 8, 9 & 10). It is while dealing with this theme that the mystic poets attain rare beauty of phrase and sentiment,

*She showed me her laughing glance*
*And I lost my soul to it.*

*Chanḍīdās*

But these happy days at Vrindāvan were to end, for Kṛishṇa had to fulfil his destiny.

The latter part of the Kṛishṇa story deals with the destruction of the wicked Kaṅsa. Kṛishṇa goes to Mathurā and after many exploits of valour slays the impious King and restores Ugrasena to the throne. Later we find that Kṛishṇa becomes the King of Dwārakā. This is the point where the Gopāla-Kṛishṇa pastoral legend merges into the semi-historical legend of Kṛishṇa as the Yādava ruler of Dwārakā.

We have already narrated how Kṛishṇa met his tragic end. What is equally sad is the fact that after the destruction of Kaṅsa he never returned to his childhood haunts of happiness in the land of Vraja. But he remains forever in the hearts of the milkmaidens. They are the true *Bhaktas* whose devotion for him is steadfast through an aeon of time and an eternity of absence.

The Rādhā-Kṛishṇa legend was the main inspiration of the Hill artists during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, and it found expression in line and colour in paintings of exquisite beauty or intense vigour. Pahārī art is largely the expression of Vaishṇava religious thought, and we often observe in these paintings a refinement, purity and depth of feeling such as only a great religious movement could have produced. The low hills of the Kāngrā Valley with their soft contours, the meandering streams brimming with water, the verdure of the terraced fields, the shimmer of its silver air, are in tune with that romantic atmosphere and tenderness that so tempers the soul of Kāngrā art. Above all, these paintings are characterized by rhythmic beauty.

The Hill artists interpreted the woodlands of Gokul and Vrindāvan in the light of their own experience. It was not the flat land of Mathurā but the low hills of the Kāngrā Valley covered with groves of mangoes and clusters of plantains where the Jamunā was a meandering hill stream, wending its way through the spurs of mountains, rather than the broad and uninteresting river of the plains. Rādhā and the *gopīs* were not the heavy-limbed Gūjarīs of Mathurā but the willowy, fair, serene girls of the Kāngrā Valley. As a pastoral idyll, the story of Kṛishṇa-Govinda inspired the Kāngrā artists, for they were lovers of the rural life of the Valley. In these paintings we see the cowherds clad in loin-cloths, with a black *kambal* as head-gear, playing hide and seek in the branches of trees, while the cows graze peacefully in the meadows. These paintings are rooted in the village life of the Kāngrā Valley, and they bring to us its peace and sweet serenity.

It was at the court of the Rājput Chiefs of the Punjab Hill States that Pahārī painting flourished in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. In the beginning there was a somewhat primitive style in vogue all over the Hills and it has come to be known as the *Basohlī Kalam* though it was not confined to the State of Basohlī. Thereafter from *circa* 1740 artists from the plains, trained in the 18th century Mughal school of painting, began to migrate to the Hills and take employment at various courts. Their work naturally displayed strong Mughal influence but at the same time it was also influenced by the old *Basohlī Kalam* and, what is even more important, by the atmosphere of the Hill country which played no small part in the formation of a new style of painting in the Hills. The new style that thus developed has been referred to as 'pre-Kāngrā' and in course of time it blossomed into what is known as the *Kāngrā Kalam*. The *Kāngrā Kalam* is not confined to the State of Kāngrā but is a term broadly used to designate the style which mainly prevailed in the Hills from about 1770 A.D. onwards, inclusive of all its local variations.

Pahārī miniature painting seems to belong to an enchanted world of far-away hills, rivers and forests where the cowherd God still dwells and every village maiden is the lotus-eyed Rādhā

*With her clinging scarf of blue.*

## PLATE 1

# THE EXCHANGE OF BABES

Kāngrā Kalam. 1780-1800 A.D. Illustration to the *Bhāgavata*
Bhārat Kalā Bhavan, Banāras. 11¾″×8¾

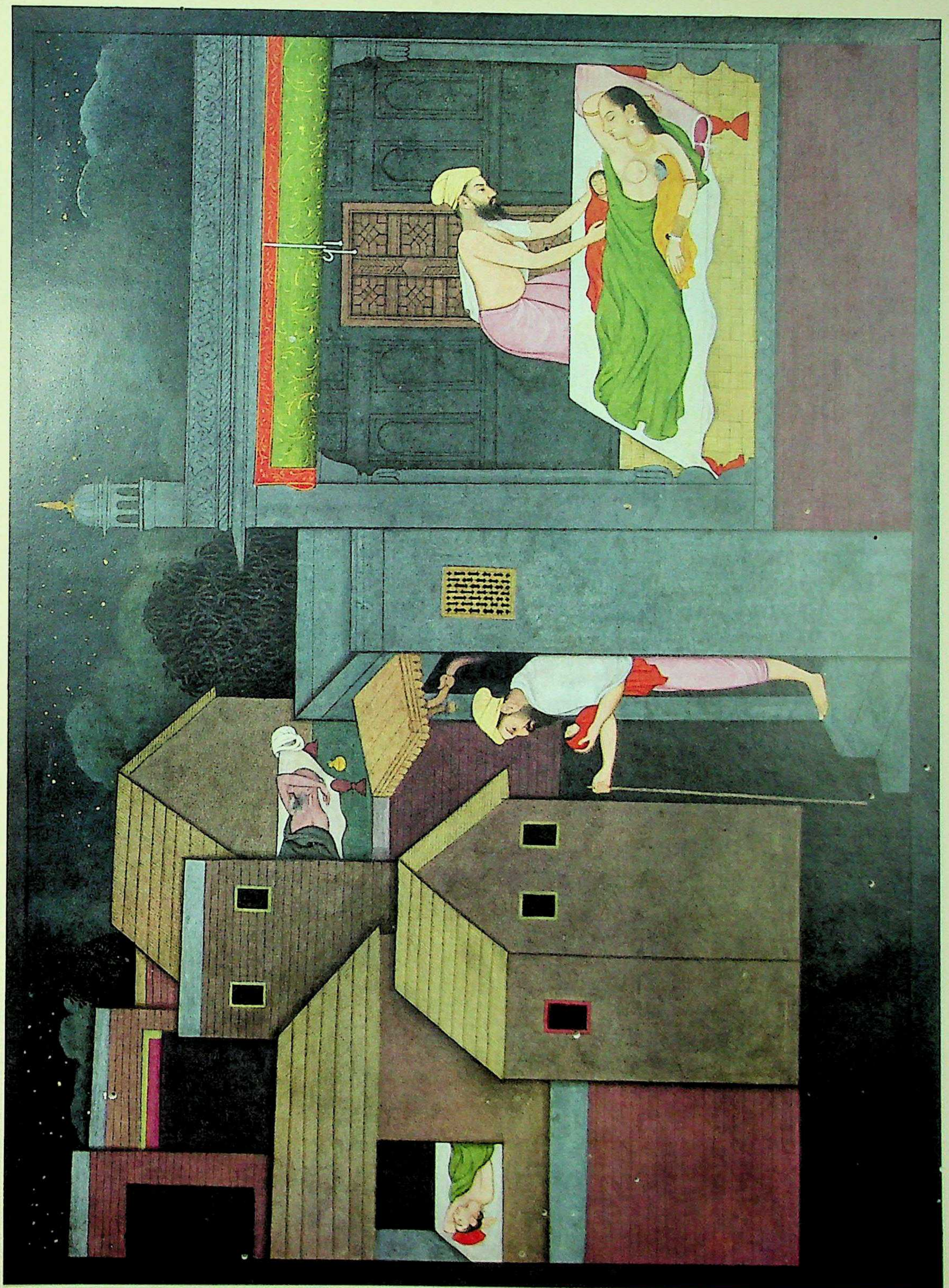
When Kṛishṇa's parents, who had been imprisoned by the wicked King Kaṅsa, beheld their new-born eighth child, they realized that he was an incarnation of Vishṇu. Even as they wondered how they could carry the child to safety, the shackles that bound Vasudeva fell away, and the prison guards fell into a deep slumber. Then Vasudeva put the babe into a winnowing basket and departed for Gokul where the Headman, Nand, had sheltered Devakī's seventh child who had been miraculously transferred from her womb to the womb of her co-wife Rohiṇī.

It was a dark night and the rain was pouring. Vasudeva reached the Jamunā which was in flood. He entered the river, and as the waters rose the child stretched forth its foot and touched the rising flood. Thereupon the mighty stream became fordable. It was a dark night, vast, deep and black, lighted by large soft stars. The stillness of the night was only broken by the long-drawn howls of jackals and the ceaseless trill of crickets. Then a strange silence fell over Gokul.

At last Vasudeva reached the village and entered the house of Nand and saw Yaśodā, wife of Nand, in a deep sleep with her new born daughter by her side. He quietly exchanged Kṛishṇa with the little girl and left for Mathurā. Yaśodā had no remembrance that she had given birth to a daughter and when she awoke and saw the infant Kṛishṇa by her side she rejoiced that the gods had granted her wish and given her a male child.

Vasudeva returned to the palace-prison and gave the girl-child to Devakī. Then their shackles miraculously replaced themselves, and the guards awoke from their slumber. Kaṅsa, on hearing that Devakī had given birth to a child, came to the prison and snatched the child away and sought to dash it against a stone, but it escaped from his hands and vanished into the sky crying: '*O Kaṅsa, what has resulted from dashing me down? Thy enemy has somewhere taken birth; now thou wilt not be preserved alive*'.

The miniature is an illustration from an extensive *Bhāgavata* series of high quality. Examples from this series are to be found in several collections. Plates 2, 7 and 12 in the present brochure belong to the same series.



## PLATE 2

## MĀKHAN CHOR—THE BUTTER THIEF

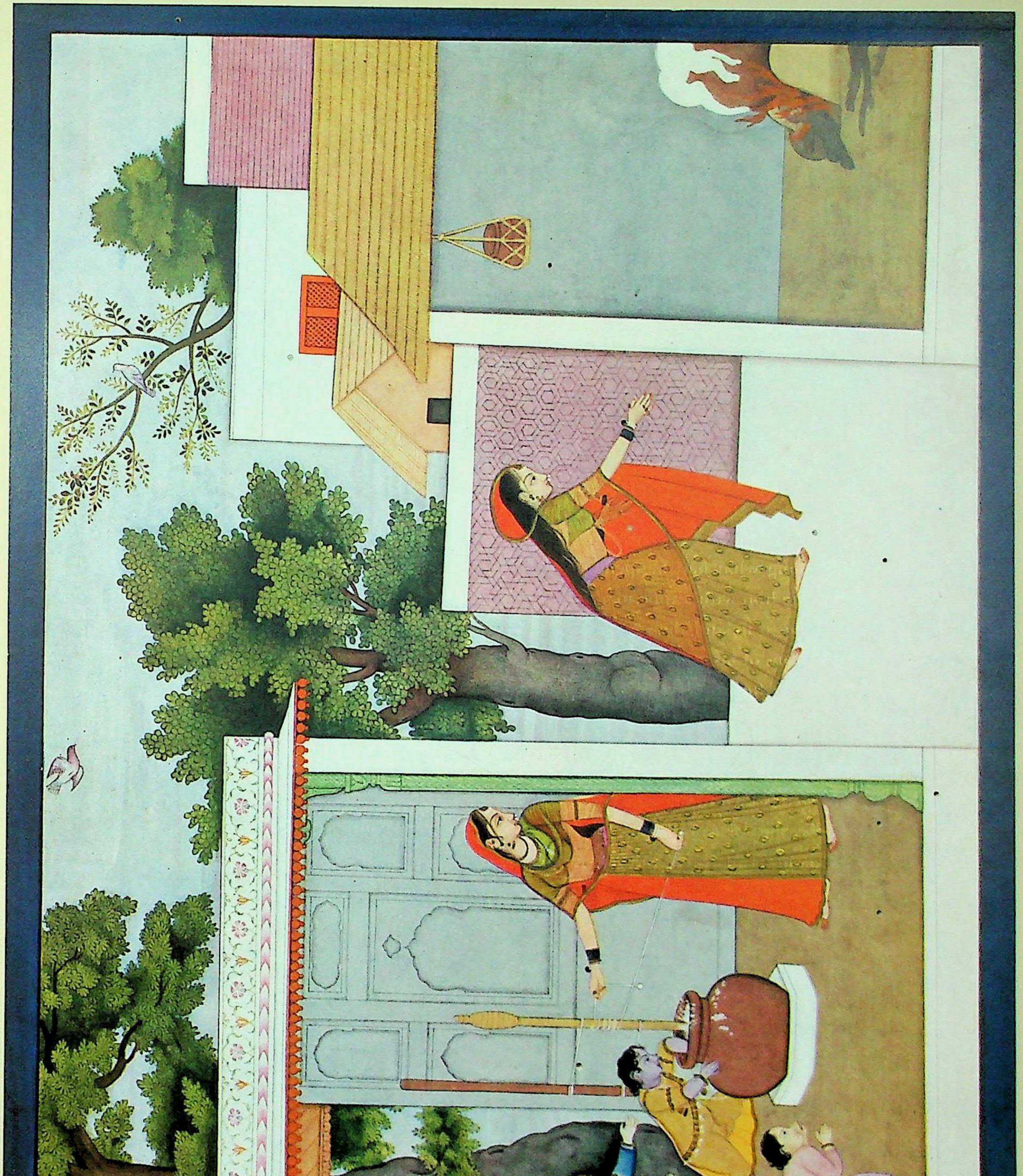
Kāngrā Kalam. 1790-1800 A.D. Illustration to the *Bhāgavata*
Courtesy F. D. Wadia, Poona. 11¾″×8¾″

Kṛishṇa was a naughty child full of pranks which were at once the despair and delight of his mother and the neighbouring house-wives. One day Yaśodā was churning curd. At that time in the house of Nand a noise of curd-churning was going on as though a cloud were thundering. This awakened Kṛishṇa who set to crying and calling out '*Mother, Mother*'. When nobody heard his cries he himself came to Yaśodā and said, '*Mother, I called thee several times, but thou didst not come to give me breakfast; is not thy work done yet?*' Thereupon Yaśodā fondled him and gave him bread and curd to eat. Just then the milk in the kitchen began to boil over and Yaśodā ran to attend to it. Taking advantage of her absence, Kṛishṇa and his companions helped themselves to the butter. The monkeys and cowherd boys had a hearty feast over the butter and spilt curd-milk.

On discovering what had happened, Yaśodā chased Kṛishṇa and threatened to beat him. She decided to tie him with a rope to a mortar. However, the rope was not long enough. She joined another rope to it, and then another, but everytime it was found to be too short. Taking pity at the exertions of his mother, who was perspiring, Kṛishṇa at last allowed himself to be bound to the mortar. After binding him Yaśodā returned to her domestic duties.

In the courtyard of the house were two *arjuna* trees. Kṛishṇa managed to crawl between the trees along with the mortar to which he was tied, and gave a jerk uprooting the trees. Out of the trees emerged Nala and Kūvar, sons of Kubera, who on account of their pride had been transformed into trees by the curse of the sage Nārada. Hearing the crashing of the trees, the cows broke their ropes in panic, and Nand and Yaśodā, as well as the neighbours all hurried to the house. The two sons of Kubera, rid of their sin, bowed to Kṛishṇa and taking their leave departed for the Himalayas.

On the left Yaśodā is seen churning butter, while on the right she is seen running to attend to the milk which has boiled over. In the meantime Kṛishṇa and his friends steal the butter.



## PLATE 3

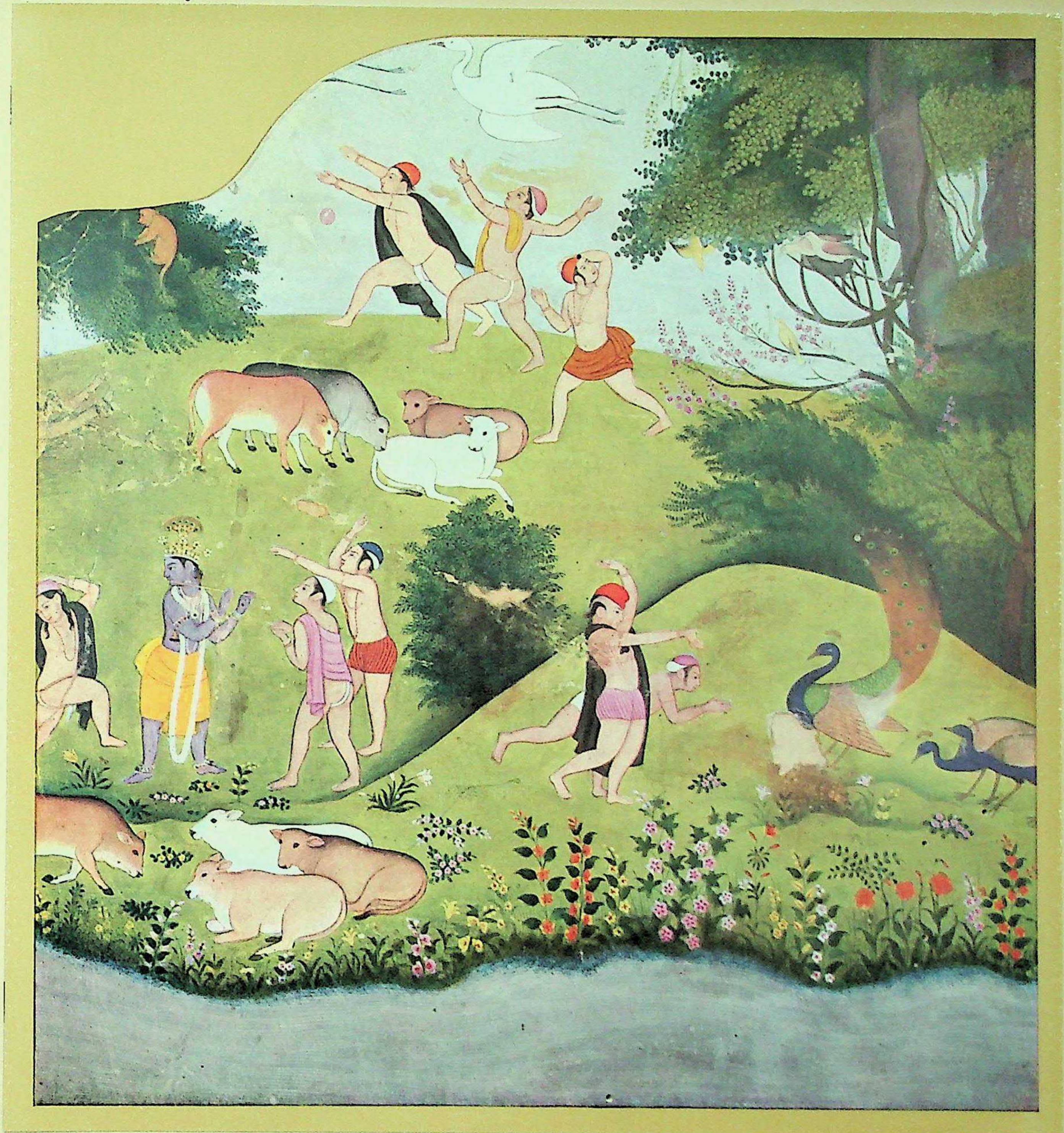
# KṚISHṆA SPORTING IN THE FOREST OF VRINDĀVAN

Kāngrā Kalam. 1780-1800 A.D. Illustration to the *Bhāgavata*
Bhārat Kalā Bhavan, Banāras. Same size

Nand and his cowherd kinsmen, harassed by the demons sent by Kaṅsa, decided to move from Gokul to Vrindāvan across the river in order to be more secure. Here the cowherd boys could swim in the river during the heat of summer and roam with the *gopīs* in the woods of Vrindāvan dotted with graceful kadamba trees.

In Vaishṇava literature there is a conscious delight in wild nature, in scenery, in the songs of birds and in free open air life. There are charming descriptions of the rainy season, lakes studded with lotuses and the great rivers in monsoon floods. The forest murmurs in our ears, we feel the breath of spring-time, and the colours of the blossoms of forest trees live and glow.

In these charmed woodlands Kṛishṇa and his companions played hide and seek, leaving the cows to graze quietly in the forest; or imitated the cries of peacocks, or the quacking of ducks; or sported with the frolicsome monkeys. On the bough of a tree a pair of blue doves is sitting, and below on the hillock is a peacock gaily strutting and displaying his iridescent feathers. In the foreground is a group of cows listening placidly to the notes of Kṛishṇa's flute while the young cowherds dance and clap their hands in tune with the rhythm of the music. The magic of Kṛishṇa's flute leads everyone, man and beast alike, in search of him. When the *gopīs* hear the sound of his flute they leave everything aside and wander about to find him, but their quest is in vain. So they sit down together in the road and talk of the magic of Kṛishṇa's flute. One says, '*Just see how that bamboo tube is honoured, drinking the nectar of Kṛishṇa's lips all day; it resounds like a cloud and pours out delight. Why is it more beloved than we? Why did not the Lord of Vraja make flutes of us to remain with him day and night?*' Such is the enchantment of Kṛishṇa's flute that the listeners, whether cowherds, birds or cows, are so fascinated that they stand still like painted images. The lotus buds resting on the Jamunā waters open, and the river itself leaving its straight course bends out in a curve to listen to the music.



## PLATE 4

# KALIYA DAMANA—THE QUELLING OF THE SERPENT KĀLIYA

Kāngrā Kalam (Guler school). Early 19th century
Punjab Museum, Chandigarh. 13¾″×11½″

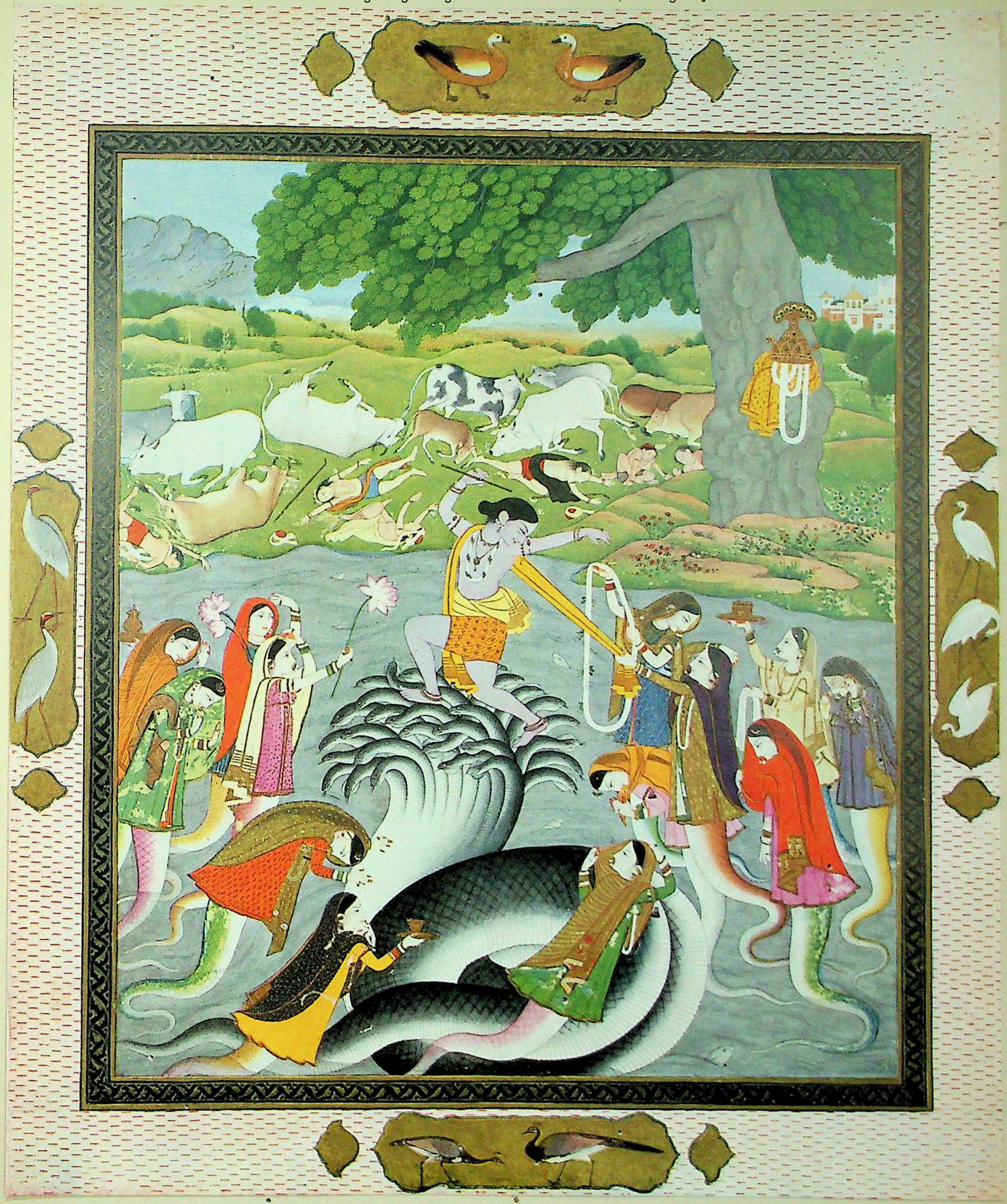
There was a whirlpool in the Jamunā known as Kālidah, which was the haunt of the poisonous King of Serpents, Kāliya Nāg. Such was the poison that nothing could remain alive near the banks of Kālidah, and the water of the whirlpool continually boiled. The only living thing near Kālidah was a stately kadamba tree on whose branches, the enemy of the serpent race, Garuḍa, had once perched. One day Kṛishṇa accompanied by the cowherd boys came to the banks of the Kālidah with a herd of cows. As soon as they reached the whirlpool the cows fainted and the cowherds were also stupefied by the poisonous fumes therefrom. When Kṛishṇa saw such things happening he decided that they must end. Placing his yellow *pitāmbara*, white garland and peacock crown on the trunk of the kadamba tree he climbed into its branches and threw a ball into the pool. Disturbed by the falling of the ball, Kāliya's hundred heads began to quiver with rage. Kṛishṇa then leaped into the water, and when the serpent saw him it coiled itself around him. Kṛishṇa now began to swell his body and thus loosened the serpent's hold. Then he mounted on the Nāga's cluster of heads and began to dance,

*Assuming the weight of the Three Worlds, Murari became ponderous ;*
*He dances about on hood after hood, he beats time with his feet.*

Kāliya now perceived that the Godhead himself had assumed incarnate form to destroy him and he abandoned all hope of life. Then the wives of the serpent implored Kṛishṇa to spare their husband saying, '*Death itself is excellent for a woman without a husband*'.

One of them offered him a white garland of jasmine, another a lotus bloom, and yet another a cup of milk. Krishna thereupon pardoned Kāliya but banished him to a distant island.

This miniature belonged formerly to the Guler Darbar collection. As in some later Kāngrā paintings, the border is very elaborate with cartouches containing charming studies of birds.



# PLATE 5

## GIRI GOVARDHAN — THE LIFTING OF MOUNT GOVARDHAN

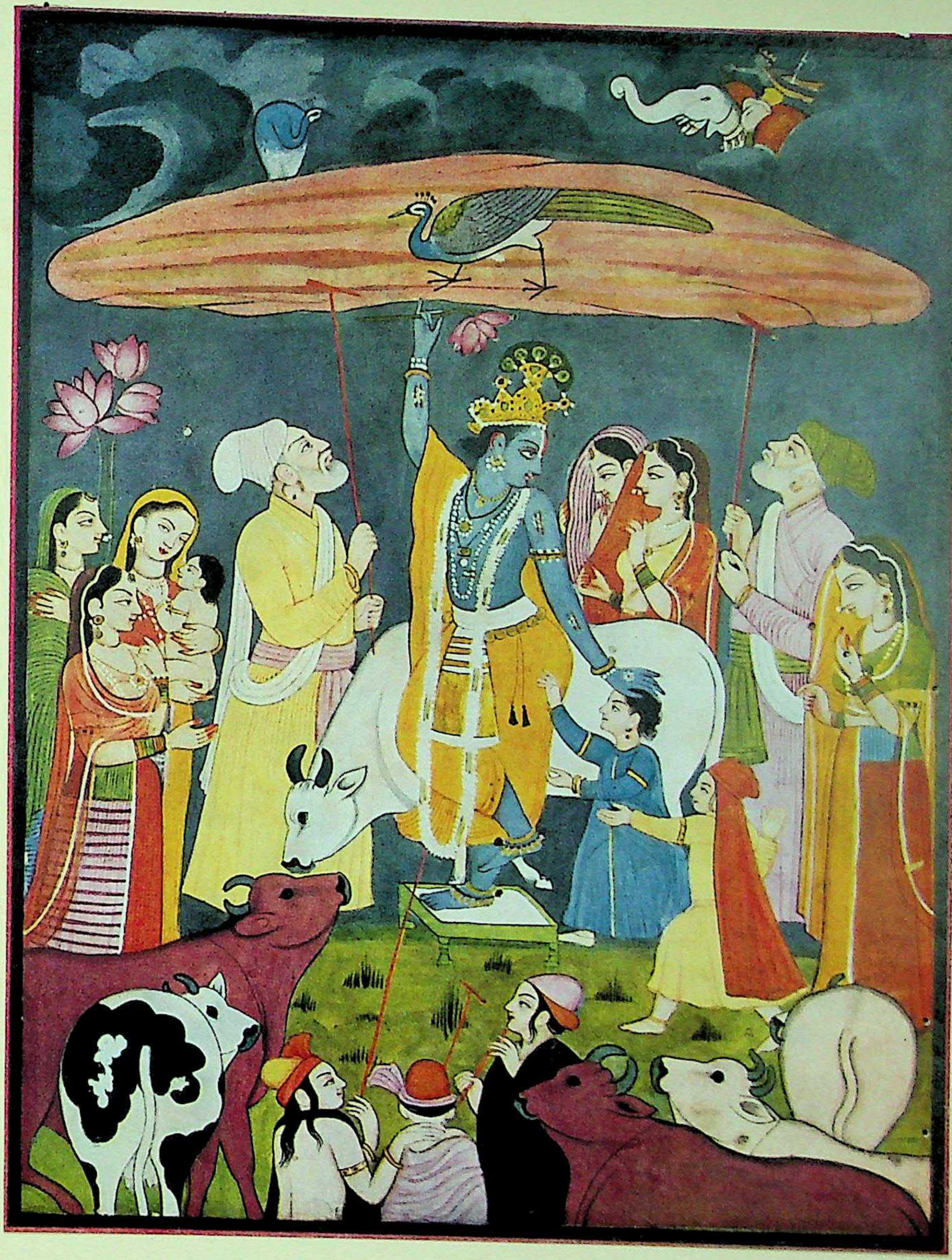
Kāngrā Kalam. Late 18th century. Artist Majnu
Bhārat Kalā Bhavan, Banāras. Same size

When Kṛishṇa was in Vraja, he saw the cowherds making preparations to celebrate the festival of Indra, the God of Rain. When Sri Kṛishṇa asked Nand about the significance of Indra and his worship, Nand replied that Indra was the Lord of Rain by whose favour grass, water and food are produced, trees blossom, and fruit and all living beings remain in happiness. On hearing this Kṛishṇa said, '*We are dwellers in woods, our king is he in whose kingdom we remain happy*'. Thereupon the cowherds spoke forth, '*Krishna tells the truth. Let us worship the woods, streams and Mountain King.*'

On the next day when it was early dawn, Nand with his family, taking flowers and accompanied by the sound of musical instruments, arrived at Govardhan and went round the mountain. The splendour of the mountain was indescribable.

When Indra learnt that in Vraja his worship had been stopped he got infuriated and set in action his hosts of annihilating clouds. Vraja was submerged under a torrent of rain. On account of excessive rain and cold winds the cows began to shiver, and the cowherds and cow-girls sought refuge with Kṛishṇa. Thereupon Kṛishṇa lifted the Govardhan mountain and the rain drops evaporated as soon as they fell on it. Kṛishṇa held up the mountain for seven days surrounded by the *gopīs*, *gopas*, their children and cattle. Indra himself came on his white elephant and tried to infuse courage into his cloud-armies, but was compelled to acknowledge defeat. On seeing the power of Kṛishṇa, Indra reflected, '*The Primeval Male has become incarnate, otherwise in whom had there been so much power*'. With his pride gone and his power shattered, Indra withdrew his cloud-armies. Kṛishṇa pardoned Indra and asked him not to be proud again because from being proud knowledge departs and evil ideas increase.

Our miniature depicts the scene when men, women and cattle are all gathered under mount Govardhan which Kṛishṇa holds aloft like a mighty umbrella.



## PLATE 6

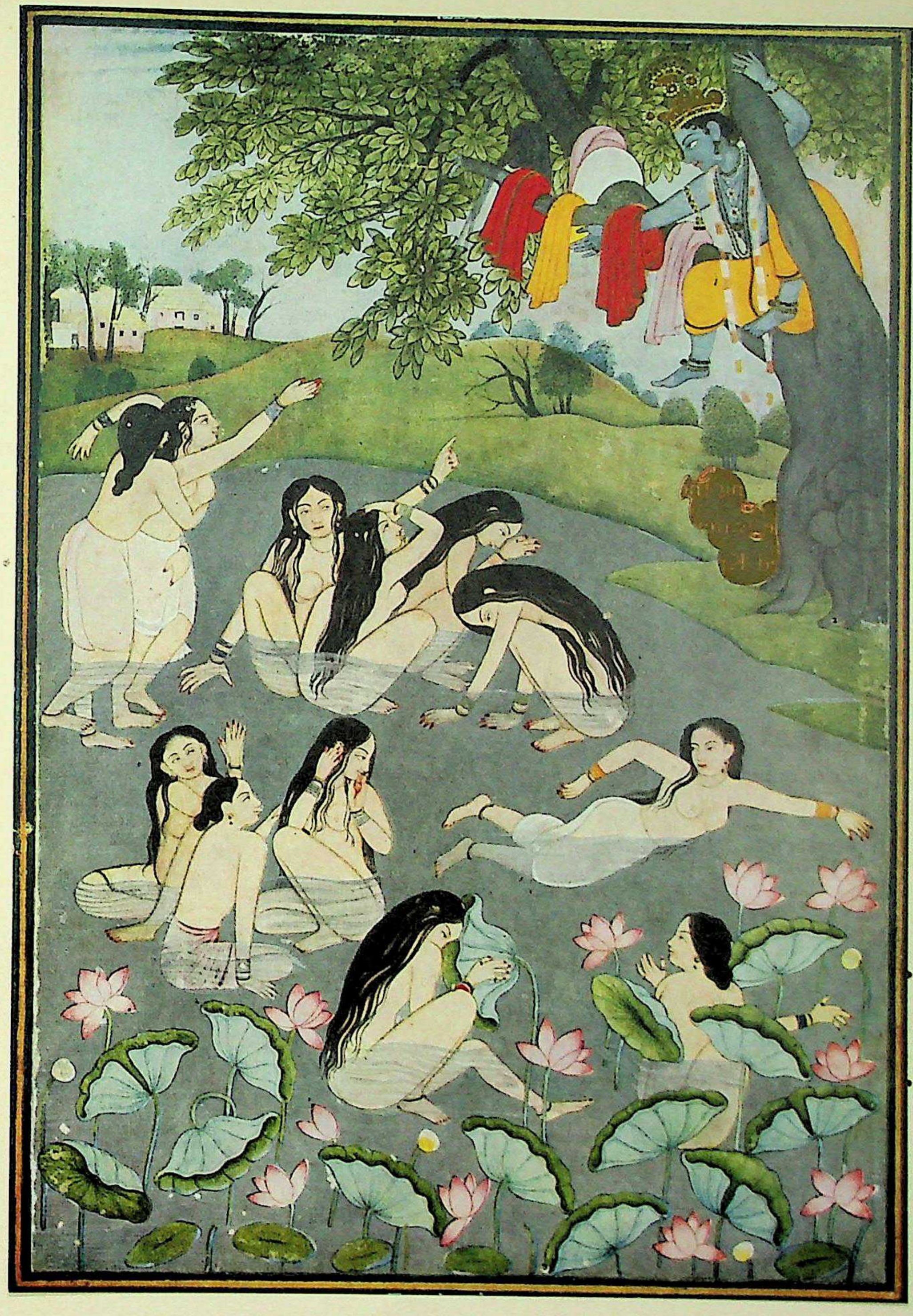
# CHĪRA-HARAṆA—STEALING THE CLOTHES OF THE GOPĪS

Kāngrā Kalam. Late 18th century
Bharāt Kalā Bhavan, Banāras. Same size

In the first month of winter the *gopīs* of Vraja prayed that Kṛishṇa might become their Lord. Then they went to an unfrequented *ghat* to bathe, and having taken off their clothes and placed them on the bank entered the water and began to sing of the virtues of Hari and to sport in the river. At that very time Sri Kṛishṇa was seated in the shade of a fig-tree, grazing cows. Having heard the sound of their singing he silently approached the river bank, and as he gazed at the bathing *gopīs* a mischievous idea entered his mind. He stole their clothes and ascended a *kadamba* tree and tying the clothes in a bundle placed them before him. When the cowherdesses emerged from the water they could not find their clothes on the river bank. In the meantime a cowherdess spied Kṛishṇa on the *kadamba* tree. The young *gopīs*, being ashamed of their nakedness, re-entered the water and joined their hands in supplication and said, '*Compassionate to the humble, O Mohan, please give us our clothes*'. But he naughtily replied, '*Come out one by one, then you will receive your clothes*'.

Hearing this the cowherdesses remonstrated with Kṛishṇa but he remained unmoved and bid them abandon shame and come out of the water. The cowherdesses, having reflected on Kṛishṇa's words, with heads bowed and trying to cover their nakedness with their hands emerged from the water. Then Kṛishṇa laughingly said, '*Join your hands and come forward, then I will give you your clothes*'. The cowherdesses replied, '*Why are you deceiving us, darling of Nand? We are plain simple Vraja girls*'. Then they joined their hands and Kṛishṇa gave them their clothes and said, '*Now go home, but in the month of Kārtik come again and sport with me*'.

In Plate 6, the *gopīs* have just spied Kṛishṇa on the *kadamba* tree with their clothes, and have re-entered the water to hide their nakedness.



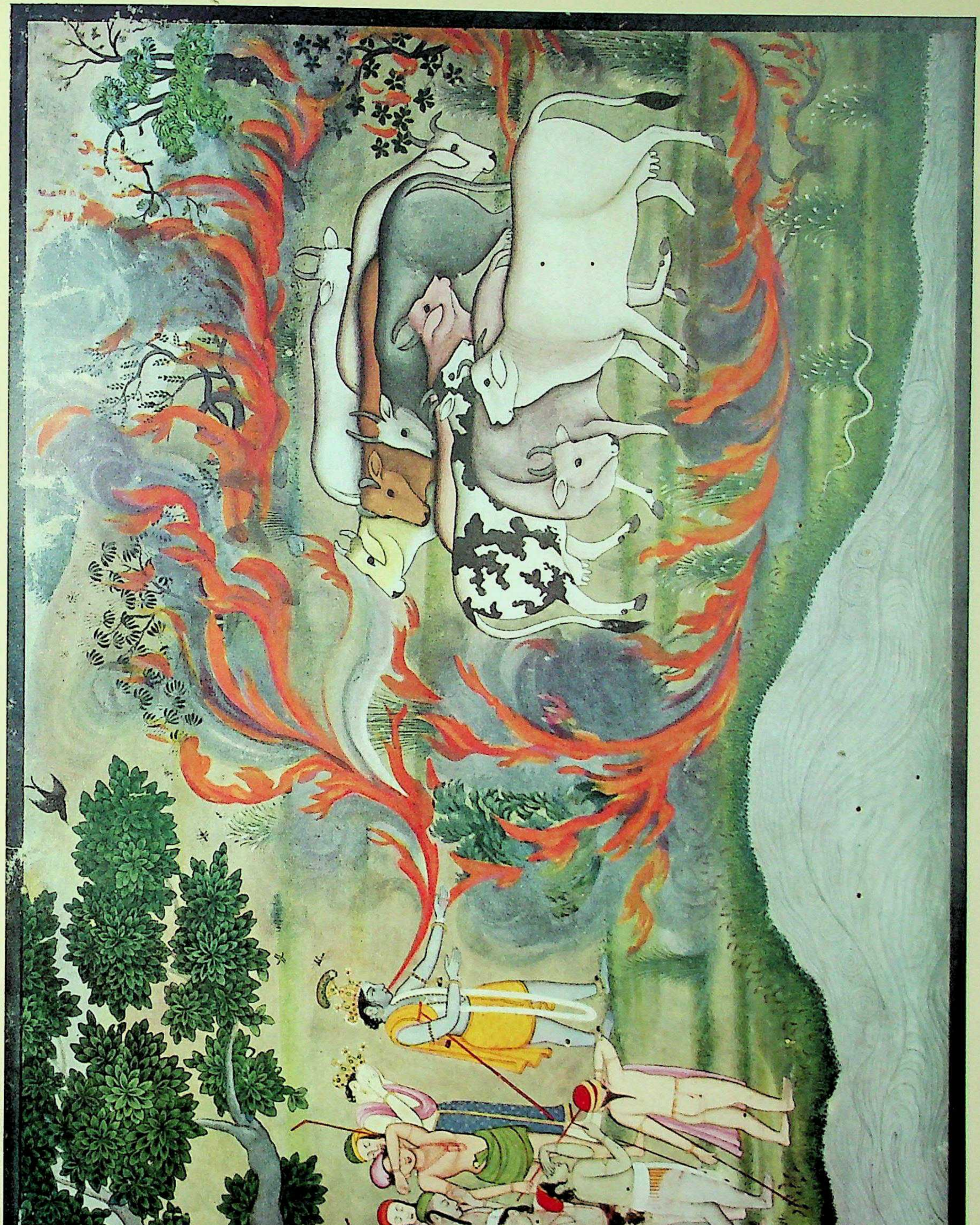
## PLATE 7

# DĀVĀNALA ĀCHAMAN — KṚISHṆA SWALLOWING THE FOREST FIRE

Kāngrā Kalam. 1780-1800 A.D. Illustration to the *Bhāgavata*
National Museum, New Delhi. 11¾″ × 8¾″

Once Kṛishṇa was grazing the cows in the forest with Balarāma and other cowherd lads. Meanwhile on all sides a raging conflagration closed in on them. The cowherds were greatly alarmed, and the cows ran helter-skelter. Birds flew high up in the air, snakes writhed in agony, and all living things tried to escape the scorching flames. The cows, the white, the dun, the black, the grey and the spotted, herded together and looked helplessly towards Kṛishṇa. The flames of the fire consumed the forest trees with their red tongues. When they saw the conflagration about to envelop them, the cowherd boys shouted, '*O, Kṛishṇa! O, Kṛishṇa! Save us from this fire; or we will be burnt to death*'. Kṛishṇa said, '*Do you all shut your eyes.*' When they all shut their eyes, Kṛishṇa in a twinkling drank up the fire.

In the evening, the cows trooped back home driven by Kṛishṇa and the cowherds. The dust which they raised, illumined by the slanting rays of the setting sun, shone like gold, and was indeed pure as water. Passing through cow-dust is regarded as a substitute for bathing. Kṛishṇa wearing a yellow wrap, a white garland and a diadem of peacock feathers, playing the flute, drove the cattle home. The *gopīs* with earthen jars filled with the Jamunā water gazed at him in a rapturous mood with their eyes motionless and full of love. From the balconies of houses women looked at him with thirsty eyes, and some pointed towards him saying, '*Here He comes.*' Some with their eyes wide open in wonder paid homage to him with folded hands. On hearing that Kṛishṇa had saved the cowherd lads and the cows from the forest fire there were rejoicings and congratulatory songs in every home in Vrindāvan.



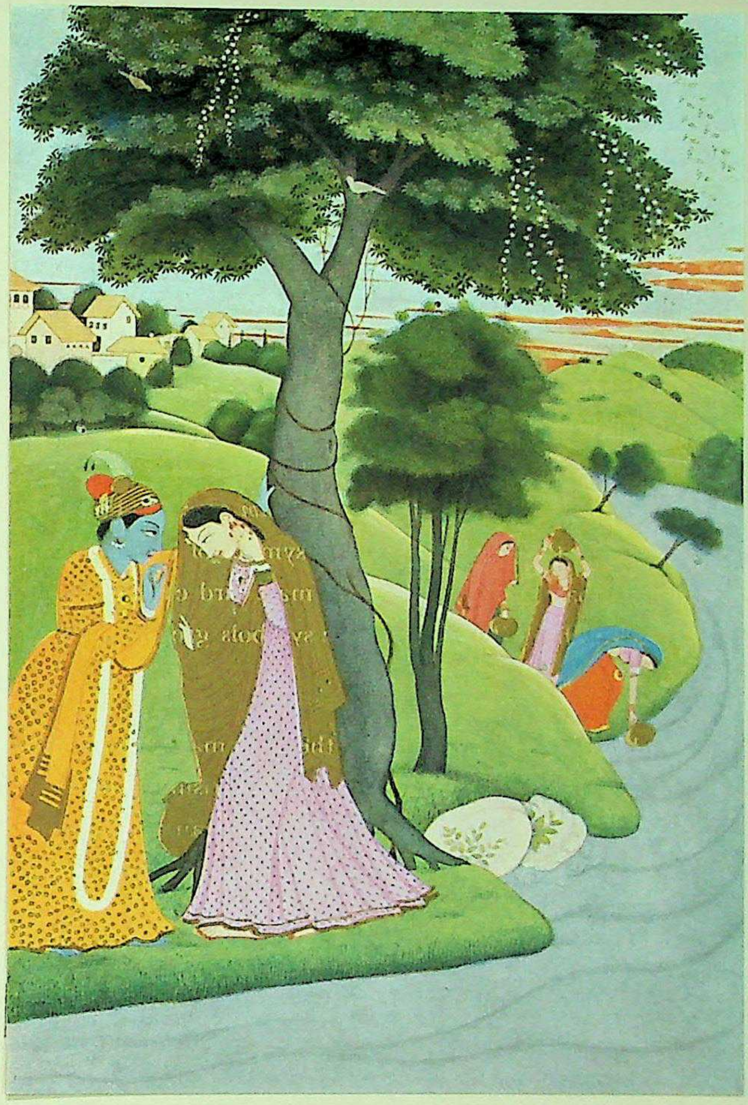
## PLATE 8

# MEETING BY THE RIVERSIDE

Kāngrā Kalam (Guler school). Late 18th or early 19th century
Punjab Museum, Chandigarh. Same size

Jamunā *ghāt* was the favourite resort of lovers, and when Rādhā came with a pitcher to fetch water from the river, Kṛishṇa created opportunities to meet her. One such meeting is shown in Plate 8. Rādhā is standing under a mango tree, concealing herself from the prying eyes of the *gopīs* who are filling their pitchers from the river. One can almost hear the murmuring of the Jamunā as it laps the spurs of the verdant hills. Rādhā's empty pitcher is lying at the base of the mango tree. Clasping the dark stem of the mango tree is a *mādhavī* creeper covered with pale yellow blossoms. In ancient India the marriage of the *mādhavī* creeper, the symbol of the female, was symbolically performed with the mango tree, the symbol of the male. On the crown of this mango tree are perched a pair of love birds, the male bird eagerly looking towards the female, as Kṛishṇa is looking at Rādhā. The use of love symbols greatly adds to the charm of Pahārī painting.

Kṛishṇa has placed his left hand on the trunk of the dark mango tree, and it seems as if two dark nights are meeting—the dark mango tree and dusky Kṛishṇa. Kṛishṇa is talking to Rādhā, who stands 'like a painted picture'. She is altogether human and feminine and rails against her own gentleness and bitterly complains of Kṛishṇa's infidelities; but in the end she gives herself up without reserve, and asks for nothing in return.



## PLATE 9

# KṚISHṆA MEETING RĀDHĀ IN THE FOREST IN SPRING-TIME

Kāngrā Kalam (Garhwāl school). *Circa* 1800
National Museum, New Delhi. Same size

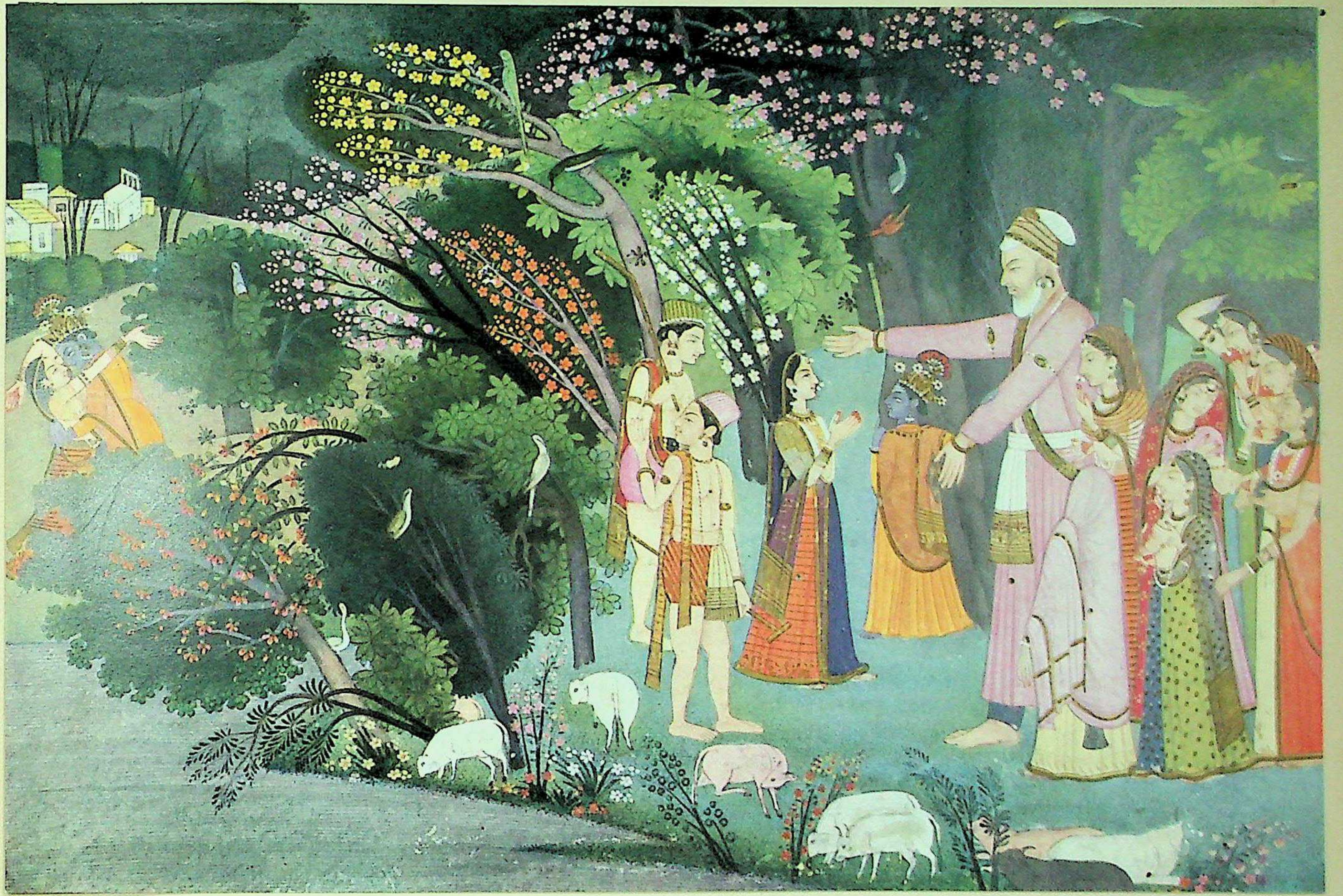
The spring had come, the air was heavy with the fragrance of the flowers of sandal, cloves, *keora* and *tamāla*. The blossoms of the *palāsh* were flaming red while orange trees were laden with fragrant white blossoms. At the foot of the *kadamba* grove is the silvery stream of the Jamunā studded with green islands. The perfume of pale silken *mogrās* was floating like a naiad on the waters of the Jamunā. The forest of Vrindāvan became beautiful as a lovely woman decorated with ornaments. The swarthy branches of bauhineas studded with white and mauve blossoms were swaying gracefully and on them sweet-throated *koels*, *papeehas*, pigeons and parrots with red and light green plumage, gave surpassing beauty to the scene. Blue doves cooed in the branches of *kadamba* trees, sun-birds flashed and egrets stalked among the cows.

Kṛishṇa was grazing cattle in the forest and Rādhā was wandering among the *tamāla* trees. The Lord gazed upon the beauty of the radiant Rādhā who appeared entrancing in her fine drapery. Her eyes were shining like a hind's in love-time and on her bosom was a garland of jasmine, heaving softly. Who could resist such beauty? While she was holding the branch of a *tamāla* tree, Kṛishṇa gave her a passionate embrace and her body thrilled to his touch.

*Soft arms shut him safe and all life melted to a happy sigh*
*And all the world was given in one warm kiss.*

Seeing the lovers locked in a passionate embrace the branches of the trees bent towards them in sympathy to provide a cover as if they were conscious of the presence of the bridegroom.

Just at that time Nand and Yaśodā, who were getting anxious about Kṛishṇa, appeared, followed by cowherdesses clad in blue and red dresses. When Nand and Yaśodā shouted, '*Kṛishṇa !*' both of them appeared before them as if nothing had happened. Kṛishṇa went to Nand, and as Rādhā greeted them, with folded hands, she appeared a picture of innocence.



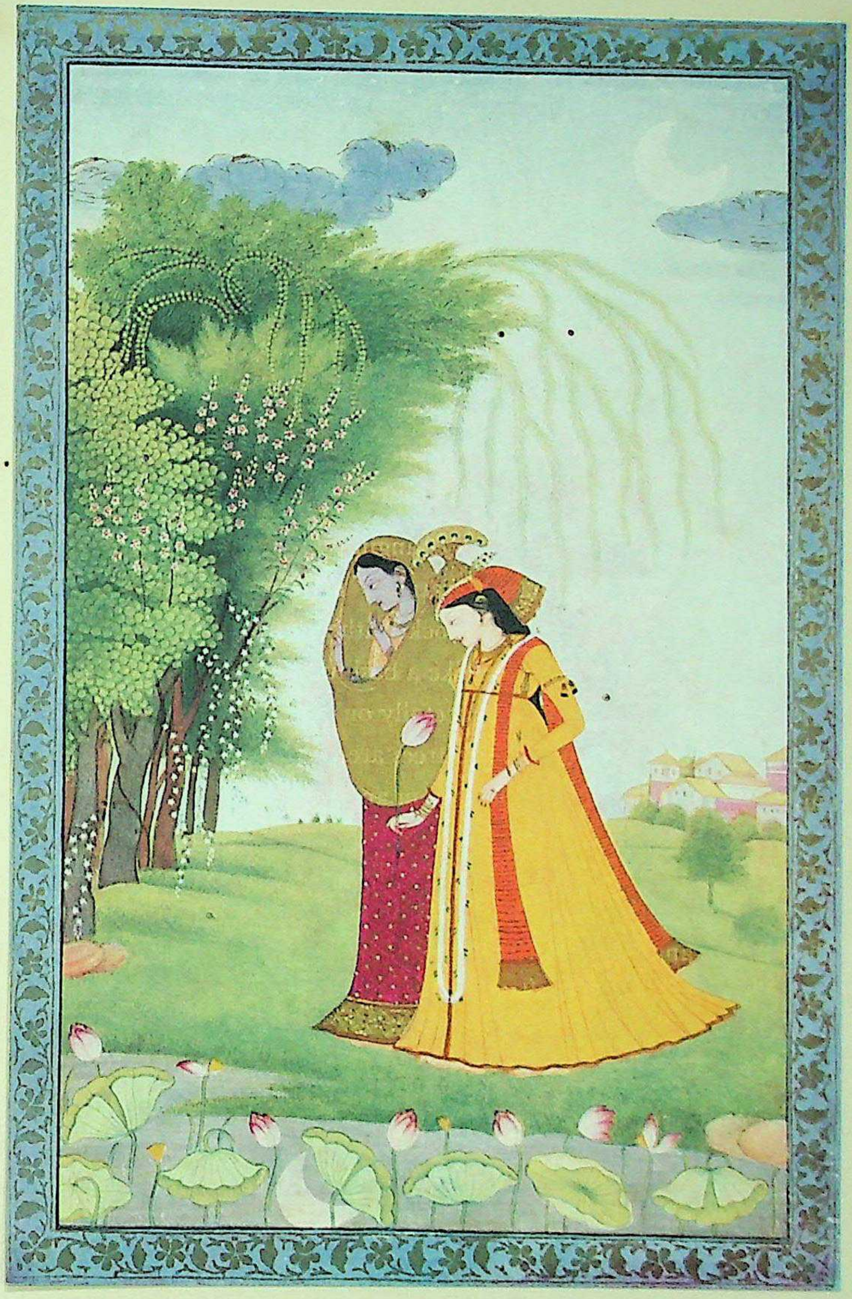
# PLATE 10

## LĪLĀ HĀVA—RĀDHĀ AND KṚISHṆA EXCHANGING CLOTHES

Kāngrā Kalam. 1780-1800 A.D.
Collection of the Raja of Lambāgrāon. Same size

The hot season had ended and it became delightfully cool after the first monsoon showers. Vrindāvan became an enchanted land; the rivers and lakes were full. The branches of *tamāla* and *arjuna* trees were waving gracefully. The branches of the willow swayed in the evening breeze and pink and white lotuses filled the lakes. The sun had set, and the moon had spread its magical radiance over Vrindāvan. Under the magic of moonlight the harsh details of the landscape faded and repose descended on the earth. Rādhā met Kṛishṇa on the bank of a lotus-filled lake and they decided to change clothes. Women changing into their husband's clothes is one of the favourite forms of love-play in Indian literature. Rādhā puts on Kṛishṇa's yellow *pītāmbara*, garland of white flowers and crown of peacock feathers, while Kṛishṇa puts on Rādhā's *ghāgrā*, *cholī* and drapes himself in her *dupaṭṭā* and like a bashful maiden veils his face. Rādhā is holding a lotus bud in her hand and is walking gracefully on the grass. The reflection of the moon can be seen in the lake among lotus buds. The trees are covered with flowering creepers which seem to be conscious of the footsteps of the bridegroom and are swaying gracefully over his head.

This miniature, apart from its beautiful rendering of the *Līlā Hāva* theme, is of considerable importance to the art historian because we can be definite that it was painted in the famed atelier of Sansār Chand of Kāngrā (1774-1823). The Lambāgrāon Chiefs are descendants of Sansār Chand and inherited part of his collection.



## PLATE 11

# RĀSA MAṆDALA—THE DANCE OF KṚISHṆA AND THE GOPĪS

Basohlī Kalam. Second half of the 18th century
Collection of the Raja of Lambāgrāon. Same size

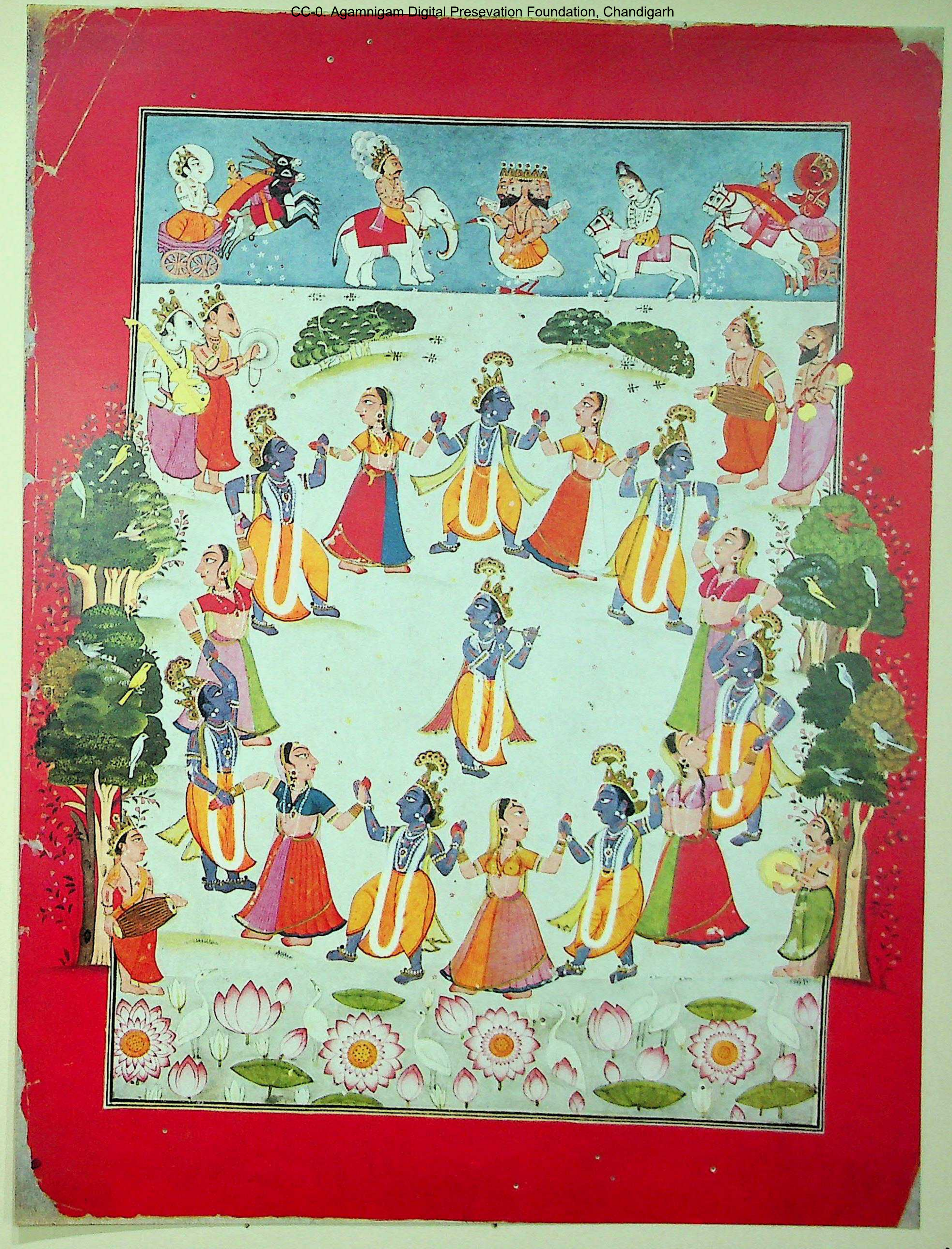
On the night of the full moon in Kārtik, Sri Kṛishṇa remembered that he had promised to meet the cowherdesses of Vraja and dance with them on this night. So he went into the woodland and sounded his flute. When the maids of Vraja heard the flute they were agitated, and abandoning the illusion of family ties and breaking through the illusion of modest reserve they rose and hurried forth to meet their lover-god. Then Mohan to tease them said, '*It is not proper for women to act so boldly ; now go home and attentively serve your husbands*'. On hearing this the cowherdesses began to say, '*O Kṛishṇa! you are a great deceiver ; you stole away our hearts and now you are uttering harsh words.*' Then Sri Kṛishṇa perceiving their great love for him said, '*We will dance*'. All the cowherdesses were delighted and danced with the blue god. Sri Kṛishṇa in the centre of the circle of cowherdesses appeared as the moon in a starry firmament.

Then Kṛishṇa taking only Rādhā with him roamed in the forest to humble the pride of the *gopīs* who had begun to think that Kṛishṇa could not resist their charms. But even Rādhā became proud and wanted to be carried on Kṛishṇa's shoulders. Just as she was about to climb on to his shoulders he vanished, and she was left alone to weep and search vainly for him. In the meantime the other *gopīs* had also begun to search for Kṛishṇa and they found Rādhā alone and forsaken. Then all the *gopīs* and Rādhā were grief-stricken and fell down in a swoon. When their pride was thus humbled, Kṛishṇa manifested himself and took them to the moonlit sparkling sands of the Jamunā and danced with them. Multiplying himself into many Kṛishṇas he danced between each pair of maidens in a ring.

*Cowherdess and Nand's son, alternate, like a dense cloud and lightning all round ;*
*The dark Kṛishṇa, the fair Vraja women, are like a gold and sapphire necklace.*

Thus they whirled on the sand on the shore of a lotus-lake, radiant with pink blossoms of lotus.

This miniature also comes from the famous atelier of Sansār Chand of Kāngrā.



## PLATE 12

# THE WATER SPORTS OF KṚISHṆA AND THE GOPĪS

Kāngrā Kalam. 1780-1800 A.D. Illustration to the *Bhāgavata*
Bhārat Kalā Bhavan, Banāras. $11\frac{3}{4}'' \times 8\frac{3}{4}''$

After the great dance (Plate 11) was over, Lord Kṛishṇa to shake off his fatigue, transgressing the code of the world and the scriptures, entered the Jamunā wishing to engage himself in water-sports with the *gopīs* who stood in the river watching Lord Kṛishṇa with affection and faintly smiling. Some started to splash water upon him, while some embraced him and others touched him with their full firm bosoms. Some yawned, raising their gentle creeper-like arms to display their beautiful breasts in an inviting manner. Kṛishṇa responded to their affection and playfully revelled in water-sports with the *gopīs*.

In this miniature the soft and phosphorescent moonlight pervades the scene. A *gopī* clings affectionately to the dark Kṛishṇa, just as the *mādhavī* creeper clings to the dark mango tree. The *gopīs* are all looking towards Kṛishṇa with eyes full of passion just as the night-blowing *mādhavī* flowers pine for the moon. One of the *gopīs*, with her willowy form bent like a bow, is trying to catch a frog. Another is gently stroking the dark tresses of her hair. Yet another, wearing a golden necklace and blue bangles, is playfully splashing water on a companion who is making an ineffective effort to resist. Yet another is gazing thoughtfully at Kṛishṇa. The river looks like a lotus-bed with a blue lotus in the middle surrounded by uprising buds of pink and white lotuses.

Having relieved his fatigue, Shri Kṛishṇa asked the *gopīs* to go home. The *gopīs* became very dejected and asked, '*Lord, how can we leave your lotus feet and go home?*' Shri Kṛishṇa said, '*Listen, as Jogis meditate on me, you also should meditate; wherever you may be, I will be near you.*' On hearing this the *gopīs* returned home.

Here ends the beautiful Gopāla-Kṛishṇa legend — the legend of the cowherd god — for it is at this juncture that Kṛishṇa goes to Mathurā and slays Kaṅsa and later becomes the ruler of Dwārakā. But he never returns to the enchanted woodlands of Vrindāvan and the fair maids of Vraja.